

**STATEMENT  
OF  
SENATOR DANIEL K. INOUE  
VICE CHAIRMAN  
COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS  
BEFORE THE  
MARCH 3, 2004  
HEARING  
ON THE  
STATUS OF COMPLETION  
OF THE  
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN**

Mr. Chairman, I have a prepared statement that I would like to have included in the record, but in the interest of time, I would like to say just a few words this morning.

The journey that has led us here today has been a long one – it began seventeen years ago in February of 1987, when this Committee held a hearing on a bill that was the precursor to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

At that hearing, the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution testified that our great national museum was in possession of over 18,500 human remains of American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians.

That testimony served as the impetus to establish a memorial on the National

Mall that might serve as a final resting place for those remains that could not be identified as being associated with a particular tribe or Native community, and thus returned.

Not long thereafter, I was invited to tour the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, in New York, and it was there I first saw the vast collection of Native art and artifacts gathered from Native communities in North, Central and South America, and the idea of establishing not only a memorial but a national museum to honor the contributions of the Native peoples of this continent was borne.

Although I have to leave to participate in a hearing of the Defense appropriations subcommittee, I wanted to take this time today to commend the Director of the National Museum of the American Indian, Mr. Rick West, for all that he has done to shepherd the evolution of this museum from vision to reality.

On September 21, 2004, we will celebrate the opening of the National Museum of the American Indian.

I am told that there will be a grand procession of Native peoples from all of the Americas – proceeding from the Washington Monument to the base of the Capitol, and then to the National Museum of the American Indian – the building that will forever stand as a symbol of the magnificence of the Native peoples of the Americas – the First Americans.